

Sidewalk Project Approved

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

Town meeting approved a \$100,000 capital budget item for sidewalks on Chestnut St.

Town Meeting 2000

despite selectmen's recommendation against the project at this time.

The sidewalks received the requisite two-thirds vote because the money will be bonded, or borrowed. They will be installed when Chestnut St. is reconstructed, probably this summer.

Two of the three selectmen were against funding the sidewalks. They wanted to delay the project until an early summer special town meeting in order to develop a town-wide policy about sidewalks and investigate possibly charging residents betterments to pay for them.

"This is somewhat of a precedent setting move here," said Selectman Andre Martecchini. "Currently, we don't have a policy in place. Many towns charge a betterment fee because it makes the houses worth more so the owners pay for the added value."

Also, by waiting until a special town meeting, the design would be complete, said Martecchini. He added that the money for the sidewalks wouldn't be available until the new fiscal year beginning July 1, so it made sense to wait.

Chestnut St. resident Tracy Copp disagreed with Martecchini's assertions. "We don't want a sidewalk to better our properties so we can sell them. We want it for safety," she said. "Chestnut St. is dangerous. This area is at a crisis point. We're avoiding tragedy every day."

"The need for sidewalks for public safety is definitely there," said Paul Brogna of the Fiscal Advisory committee.

Most Chestnut St. residents support sidewalks because their busy street, which runs from Tremont St./Route 3A to Hall's Corner, is too dangerous for walking or bike riding because of the speed and volume of traffic. The sidewalks are recommended by Department of Public Works director Walter Tonaszuck, who has proposed a 4 to 5 foot asphalt sidewalk with a curb on one side of the street.

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Chestnut St.

Town meeting gave permission for a non-voter to speak and young Ian Davis of Chestnut St. told the auditorium how much sidewalks were needed. "I really enjoy cycling up to Hall's Corner and the dirt shoulders are really dangerous," he said. "I also like to cycle to school, but I do it less

and less because it's dangerous. I think we should really put in sidewalks."

Selectman Margaret Kearney was also in favor of the sidewalks. "I think we need sidewalks and I think we need a policy. I think we can do both," she said. Kearney felt that while the sidewalks were being designed by Tonaszuck, the selectmen could work on the policy. Kearney also did not believe the Chestnut St. residents should pay betterments.

Don LaRose of Christina Court was also against betterments. "It's not right to charge homeowners for something that is a basic need," he said.

Opponents of the betterments wondered how the town could fairly assess them. They asked if only the people who had the sidewalks in front of their homes would be charged wondered if the betterments would even be affordable for residents who lived on long and unpopulated streets.

The sidewalk project also earned the endorsement of the Highway Safety Committee.